ways of strengthening relations and current international issues.

Cyprus

During his meeting with the President of Cyprus, the Prime Minister held discussion on matters of bilateral interest as well as ways for strengthening relations between the two countries and current international issues.

China

Prime Minister met Chinese Premier Li Peng on 16 November and expressed the hope that President Jiang Zemin's visit to India would lead to improve relations between the two countries. The two sides expressed their respective view-points on a number of issues, including those of concern to either side, which came up for discussions during the meeting.

Bangladesh

Prime Minister met the Prime Minister of Bangladesh on 17 September and reviewed bilateral relations. It was agreed to take steps to enhance relations in all areas of interest to both sides. Prime Minister also briefed the Bangladesh Prime Minister on the situation in the region and referred to Pakistan's support for terrorism in India.

Iraq

Prime Minister met the Vice President of Iraq on 16 November. Bilateral relations and future economic cooperation with Iraq after the UN economic sanctions against that country are lifted, were discussed.

Nepal

The Prime Minister received the Prime Minister of Nepal on 17 November. A wide range of subjects were covered during discussions and the friendly, cordial nature of bilateral relations was reiterated. The discussions emphasised not only the need for intensifying bilateral economic cooperation but also the need for diversifying trade relations. During exchange of views on latest developments in the South Asian region, specific emphasis was also laid on the need for exploiting the immense economic potential of the region for the benefit of its people.

Iran

During the meeting between the Prime Minister and First Vice President of Iran on November 16, issues of bilateral, regional and international importance were discussed.

Afghanistan

During the meeting with the President of Afghanistan on November 15, situation in Afghanistan was discussed. Our Prime Minister reiterated India's support to the Rabbani Government and called for cessation of outside interference in Afghanistan.

Cuba

Prime Minister called on President Fidel Castro on 17 November. The two leaders recognised existence of extremely warm and cordial relations between the two countries over the last several decades and need to strengthen them further. They discussed the prevailing international situation in relation to Russia, China, Palestine etc. and multilateral economic issues, in particular the question of eradication of poverty and hunger, augmenting agricultural production, population control and South-South cooperation. President Castro stressed the need for cooperation among Third World countries in solving their problems. He wanted India to play a leadership role and reiterated Cuba's desire to see India as a Permanent Member of the Security Council. He accepted invitation of our Prime Minister to visit India at his convenience.

[English]

Bridges in Bihar

3471. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR : Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state :

(a) the number of bridges constructed on the National Highways in Bihar since 1994;

(b) the total expenditure incurred thereon;

(c) whether some of the proposals of construction of bridges in Bihar are pending with the Union Government; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the action taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI T.G. VENKATRAMAN) : (a) Seven.

(b) Expenditure upto 3/96 is reported to be about Rs. 263.98 lakhs.

(c) and (d) No proposal of Bridge works is pending with Ministry.

Indian Assistance to Nepal

3472. SHRI K.P. SINGH DEO : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) the number of Projects being implemented in Nepal with the assistance from India;

(b) the cost of those Projects and the extent of assistance extended by the Government for implementing those projects; and

(c) the steps taken to improve bilateral relation between both the countries?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) 15 Projects in Nepal are under implementation or under consideration for execution with Indian assistance.

(b) Indian aided Projects along with the estimates are given below. These Projects are fully funded by Government of India :

(Rs. in crores)

	Project	Cost
1.	Sirsiya Bridge at Raxaul (since completed)	3.50
2.	Rajbiraj Industrial Estate (since completed)	2.12
3.	B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences Project at Dharan	88.00
4.	22 Bridges on Kohalpur Mahakali Sector of East-West Highway	55.00
5.	Supply of Iodised Salt for Goitre Control	9.96
6.	Lumbini Project	3.44
7.	Hetauda Museum	3.68
8.	Expansion of Shree Panch Indra Rajya Laxmi Maternity Hospital	1.00
9.	Broadgauging of Birganj-Raxaul rail link	13.00
10.	Greater Janakpur Development Project	50.00
	New Projects	
11.	Expansion of Bir Hospital by 200 beds	28.00
12.	Koshi-Bharada Road	7.00
13.	Embankment along Bagmati, Kamala, Khado and Lalbakaiya rivers	41.00
14.	Biratnagar-Rangeli-Bhadrapur Road	260.00
15.	Birpur-chatara Road	17.00

(c) There is a constant endeavour to strengthen and diversify bilateral relations with Nepal. In the past year, high level visits have been exchanged between the two countries. The External Affairs Minister visited Nepal in January 1996 followed by the visit of Prime Minister of Nepal to India in February 1996 and the visit of the Foreign Minister of Nepal to India in August 1996. During these visits an extensive exchange of views and a detailed review of bilateral relations took place.

In August 1996, the High Level Task Force (HLTF) met in New Delhi to have a project-wise review of economic relations between the two countries. The major ongoing project being implemented with Government of India assistance include the setting up of a medical college and institute at Dharan, and the construction of 22 bridges on the East-West Highway in Western Nepal. Further additional locomotives and coaches have been supplied to strengthen services on the Jayanagar-Janakpur railway sector. Work on surveys for outer ring road at Janakpur, broad-gauging of rail link between Raxaul and Sirsiya, as well as other Projects have been initiated. During the visit of the Prime Minister of Nepal to India in February 1996, the "Treaty concerning the integrated Development of the Mahakali River including Sarada Barrage, Tanakpur Barrage and Pancheshwar Project" was concluded. This Treaty envisages implementation of the concerned Projects jointly by India and Nepal. These Projects on completion would yield significant benefits to both countries. Steps are already underway to follow up on the necessary activities to commence implementation of the various Projects. In addition, a liberalised trade regime to enhance bilateral commercial exchange in general and Nepal's exports to India in particular, is being facilitated.

MFN Status to India by Pakistan

3473. SHRI BIJOY HANDIQUE : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Pakistan has taken any effective steps to accord the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Status to India;

(b) whether Pakistan has laid down a condition that India opened up her border; and

(c) whether Government have met opposition from security agencies on this point?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) Pakistan has not yet accorded Most Favoured Nation status to India.

(b) Government has not received any proposal from Pakistan regarding India opening its border as a condition for Pakistan granting India the MFN status.

(c) Does not arise.

[Translation]

Branches of Indira Gandhi National Open University

3474. SHRI DATTA MEGHE :
SHRI BRAJ MOHAN RAM :

Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state :

(a) the places where the branches of the Indira Gandhi National Open University are located;

(b) whether some more branches are being opened; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?